

Molly Reid Library

A BRIEF SKETCH OF
GEN. GEORGE REID

Of Londonderry, N. H.

Written by

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GEN. GEORGE REID.

Birth-place.

In these days much interest is shown in locating the place of birth of men, who have been distinguished in the history of this country.

It has not always been found possible with certainty to establish conclusive evidence that the general tradition of a birth place is correct. In this particular instance there is found a very satisfactory, and even convincing proof, that the birthplace of one of New Hampshire's great generals in the Revolutionary war is known. He was born in the south-easterly part of Londonderry and not far from the birthplace of another highly distinguished Revolutionary general of whom New Hampshire is especially proud, Gen. John Stark. Their fathers were James Reid and Archibald Stark, and at the time this narrative begins they were farmers living on homesteads, laid out in that part of Londonderry now included in the town of Derry. James Reid, there was a Matthew Reid also who had a homestead, and Archibald Stark were not

original proprietors of their land, but obtained their farms by purchase a few years after the settlement. Homesteads were first laid out under the title of an old Indian Deed, in 1719, and the town was called Nutfield. In about three years 1722 a charter was obtained from England, affording protection to the rights of settlement upon these lands, and the name of the town was changed to Londonderry. These farms were in the wilderness, without roads and without fences, until the settlers found time and opportunity to develop the resources of a new country. The laying out of highways and building stonewalls soon established lines and means of identification of homesteads, and residences, that are of great value in locating the early settlers. The exact location of the home of Gen. George Reid's father, as well as the home of the father of Gen. John Stark, is settled conclusively by reliable records. For a single case of this means of identification reference will be made to a certain transcript from the town records of Londonderry, which reads as follows:

"Londonderry, June 16, 1728. Then laid out by the selectmen a highway two rods wide commencing at the house James Reid now lives in, on the line between said James Reid and Matthew Reid's lots, running

northerly to the westerly corner of James Reid's enclosed field, thence running easterly four rods wide across said James Reid's lot along the fence already made, and running from said westerly corner before mentioned westerly four rods wide across Matthew Reid's and James MacCurdey's lots. along the northerly side of a swamp on the north side of James MacCurdey's house to the line between James MacCurdey's and James Wilson's lots, thence running northerly on said line to James Wilson's house two rods wide, thence running northwest to Leveret's meadow, and running west on the south side of said meadow, as near said meadow as good ground can be found, to the line between James MacKertney's land and David Gregg's land, and thence running northerly two rods wide on said line to the line between Mr. James MacKeen and Archibald Stark's land, and thence running northerly on said line to the highway already laid out which leads to Alexander Nichol's house.

Recorded this 29th day of June 1728,
Per John MacMurphy, Town Clerk.

James Lindsay,

Allen Anderson,

John Archibald,

James Reid

Selectmen.

From reading this record, and knowing well the roads in this part of the town, it is easy to locate the farm and the site of the house, where Gen. George Reid was born, and this occurred about five years later than the laying out of the highway, passing his father's house, cultivated lands and closed fields.

Childhood.

It is interesting to think of the surroundings of this George Reid, when he was yet a child with his father and mother and his older brothers and still older sister. And then just a little west of his father's house there was the house of his uncle, Matthew Reid, and his family. His father's farm and his uncle's farm lay side by side, with only a highway two rods wide between them. On the east side of the two homesteads, and bounding on James Reid's farm for nearly two hundred rods, was a tract of land laid out to the Lieut. Gov. John Wentworth, as a part of his five hundred acres of land located in Londonderry at a place called Leveret's. It is of no special interest to read about any of the many farms laid out to the Lieut. Governor of the Province of New Hampshire, but this one

happens to adjoin the home of our Londonderry hero of the Revolution, and so a transcript is given here, as follows:

“Londonderry, July 2, 1728. Then laid out to Lieut. Governor John Wentworth fifty acres of land in said town, be it more or less, which is what he wanted of his five hundred acre farm, said land lying and adjoining to his farm which Robert Kennedy now lives upon, and is bounded in manner as follows (viz) by a stake and stones standing on the east line of the aforesaid farm and is the southwest angle of John Morrison, Junior's land, from thence running south on said farm to James Reid's land to a white oak tree, marked J. W. from thence running east-and-by-south sixteen rods to a stake and stones, which is the northeast angle of the aforesaid James Reid's land, from thence running south one hundred and ninety rods, bounding on said James Reid's land to a stake and stones, from thence running east-and-by-north thirty-four rods to a white oak tree, marked, from thence running north two hundred and fifty-four rods to a stake and stones, from thence running west-and-by-south to the bounds first mentioned, there being land laid out within said bounds for one cross road four rods wide.

At a proprietors' meeting held at Londonderry November 18, 1728 the return or transcript of the aforesaid tract of land was read and approved by the town for the aforesaid Lieut. Gov. Wentworth's proper use and benefit and behoof in fee.

Recorded this 3d of December 1728, Pr.
John MacMurphy, Town Clerk.

John Wallace,

John Archibald,

John Mitchell.

Committee."

This is a contribution to the published history of the family of George Reid, that cannot be found in any printed volume, or any map of the township of Londonderry, before the production of my own maps, constructed from a copy of the Proprietor's Book of Records of the laying out of homesteads, second divisions, additions, and amendment lands. There had never been any attempt to represent the arrangement of these several allotments of land. The difficulties encountered in locating old settlers, and obtaining any knowledge of their farms, their boundaries and their neighbors, were almost beyond the research of the ordinary historical genealogist.

Education.

There was some opportunities for a moderate education in the earliest settlement of the town; but much depended upon the schoolmaster and much upon the co-operation of the parents. George Reid had the advantage of good parentage in the essential requirements for a reasonable education. His father had received a University training, and obtained a graduate degree from an excellent institution. There were other contributing circumstances, such as access to printed books, not so common in other families. The mother also had brought an unusual amount of intelligence and worthy character to the raising of this family. The children too, in the order of their advancement, built up a sturdy, healthful and vigorous manhood and womanhood, after the example of their elders. James Reid, the father, was twenty-nine years of age when the first child, John, was born in 1724. Mary Reid, his wife, was four years younger, following each other about two years apart were John, Elizabeth, Matthew, Thomas and George.

About twenty years ago, when I was preparing a complete list of all the inscriptions upon the monuments in Forest Hill

Cemetery, to be published in "Willey's Book of Nutfield," my attention was drawn to the Reid gravestones, and particularly to the stone which marks the burial place of this John Reid, son of James and Mary Reid, who was taken away so early in life. The use of Latin does not always imply a personal acquaintance with the language, but in this instance, knowing that the father had the requisite scholarship to make his own selection, it seems to indicate the continuation of study, and the presence of books in the household. The loss of the eldest child must have been a sad bereavement and the monument serves to impress the reader with the unusual circumstances of affliction. "A large horizontal slab on four pillars, ornamented with figures of a skull and crossed bones, an hour glass and a coffin in a square; above the square of emblems the words 'Memento Mori'; on the right of the square the words 'O mors quam dura, quam tristitia sunt tua jura'; on the left of the square the words 'Si Mors non esset quam laetus que libet fiat; and below the square the words 'Here lyeth the body of John Reid who departed this life on the 7th day of November in the year of Our Lord 1738, being 14 years and 9 months old."

To a child of six years, the death of an older brother with whom he had played, the mystery of the still white shrouded body in the coffin, the thought of burial in the lonely ground, the black garments of mourning must have left their peculiar impressions deep and lasting. And for him there must have remained a certain sense of awe and restraint in the room where little George had seen his dead brother, and a fear to enter that apartment at night alone or without a light to dispel the unnatural gloom. Through the whole period of his long life, Gen. George Reid had a sensibility to the reality of the unseen the power and presence of the invisible, the necessity of trusting to the protection and guidance of a Divine Providence. How this sense of timidity in the presence of death, and the uncertainty of escape from peril and danger wrought upon his mind and determined his character, we shall have reason to observe, as we follow his career, and are made familiar with the inmost recesses of his heart in tender correspondences under trial, deprivation and distress of war.

Manhood

When George Reid was about twenty-two years of age his father died, leaving him to care for his mother, also the responsibility of a large farm to be managed so as to furnish the wants of the family and the stock. His only sister, Elizabeth Reid, was married to John Nesmith and settled on a neighboring farm, and the brothers had gone away to seek their fortunes. Much of the labor of the farm was routine, and uninteresting except that extra service to all generations following, the gathering of stones from the cultivated grounds and the construction of miles of stonewalls. He was so busy with cares that there was little thought of marriage while his mother remained in strength and capacity to perform the obligations of the house. When he did consider the matter of marrying seriously he was past thirty. He was prudentially fortunate in the choice of a companion and wife for Mary Woodburn had the virtues of her progenitors.

The formation of the West Parish in Londonderry had been anticipated from the beginning of special services there, as early as 1730, when the Rev. David McGregor, son of the Rev. James McGregor, began to

preach there. In 1737 the West Parish was established and the Rev. David McGregor settled as its pastor, remaining active until his death in 1777. James Reid, the father of George, allied himself with the West Parish and became a member of its sessions. And as the West Parish was the residence of John Woodburn, his daughter, Mary Woodburn and George Reid had frequent occasion for acquaintance, and friendship that resulted in a happy marriage. Later it will be seen that a son of the Rev. David McGregor came to address, win and marry a daughter of this same George and Mary Woodburn Reid. But that is running ahead of the story.

George took the young and beautiful wife home to the farm, where she relieved the aged mother of household duties that began to assume the nature of a heavy burden. After the manner of the times the fine old mother became a grandmother, and Mary Woodburn Reid the joyful mother of a daughter, named Elizabeth, born 1765, and this is the daughter who grew up to marry the parson's son Robert in after years. And this Elizabeth McGregor was the one who caused monuments to be suitably inscribed to the memory of several of the Reid family buried in Forest Hill. After Elizabeth

were born in order, at somewhat regular intervals, James 1767, Mary 1770, John 1772 and George in 1774. All these were born before the old grand-mother departed this life. There were others of the family name, with a numerous posterity, that lived in Londonderry of which more particular mention should sometime be given in town histories and records. But this is not the place to recall their deeds to mind. Prosperity attended the immediate family of George Reid on the old homestead and as his family increased, and his resources promised support, he determined to build a new and larger house. The house, that he commenced to build after the birth of his fifth child, is now in a good state of preservation. The work of construction was heavy, considering the size of the timbers that are visible in the corners and ceiling of some of the rooms. And there is still the big old fashioned fireplace with a great flat stone for the hearth piece. The building of the house was interrupted for a period of eight years by a sudden event, a great calamity threatened the country, a revolution was announced and our townsman, George Reid, left everything behind to serve his country.

Revolution.

The statue of a minute man at Concord, Mass., the work of Daniel Chester French, sculptor born on New Hampshire soil, represents the popular idea of the early defenders of American Independence. Men like George Reid, foreseeing the necessities of defence, had voluntarily bound themselves at the approach of danger, at a minute's notice and summons, to leave everything behind, leave the plow in the furrow, their families to the care of the boys and the women, and take their flint-lock muskets, and powder and balls, and march away to the attack of the enemy; having their provisions sent after them.

At the very beginning of the war of the revolution in 1775 George Reid was able to set out from Londonderry with a hundred Minute men and marched to the siege of the British forces in Boston. Sallies of troops from Boston had attempted to capture arms, and magazines of supplies for colonial defences, from the patriots; and these troops were to be checked, driven back into Boston, and finally compelled to abandon even that strong position. Of the company from Londonderry George Reid was captain, and Abraham Reid was Lieutenant. As

soon as Capt George Reid arrived at the point of action with his company he found other New Hampshire men with their officers, and other companies arriving daily to be formed into regiments and brigades. The steps by which promotions came to our countryman George Reid were rapid. He was prompt to meet the enemy on every occasion and was soon commissioned a Colonel of the second regiment from New Hampshire, and next to John Stark, who, was Colonel of the first New Hampshire regiment. These two men of Londonderry continued to raise confidence in the hearts of their compatriots, and continually new recruits were gained for the American Army from New Hampshire, the town of Londonderry sending several hundred men into the field, more than a proportionate enlistment. In the long continuation of the American Revolution, our two Londonderry heroes received the well earned commission of Brigadier General of the American Army. It will be impossible in a brief review to give any account of the numerous engagements in which Gen. George Reid served his country, or rather laid the safe foundations for the freedom and independence of a newly organized commonwealth. As we find it re-

ported by all reliable historians, Gen. George Reid served with courage and honor in about every engagement of the American Army with the army of the British; enduring hardships and privations with the private soldiers in severe winters and scant provisions.

He led his forces at Bunker Hill, Long Island, White Plains, Trenton, Brandywine, Germantown, Saratoga and Stillwater. He endured the sufferings of a winter's encampment in Valley Forge. The Indians took occasion to burn and destroy villages, slaughtering the unprotected citizens, and banded together as the Six Nations they became so formidable, that Gen. George Reid with his forces was sent by George Washington, the Commander in Chief of the American Army, to deal with them in such manner as to secure the lives and property in these scattered villages and settlements.

Gen. John Sullivan and his forces also were engaged in the expedition to punish the Six Nations for their massacres of the settlers in Wyoming and Cherry Valley. Gen. Reid continued his military services at the head of his forces until the war was ended, and even as late as 1786, eleven years after he entered the service, he was in command of a military force to put

down a political, and administrative rebellion that occurred in his own state, and had the hardihood to undertake this commission against the wishes and sympathies of many of his own townspeople.

Some Notable Letters.

In the Rev. Edward L. Parker's History of Londonderry, there are several letters and extracts from correspondence, between George Washington and our Londonderry hero of the Revolution. This book has now become rare, and few have the opportunity to obtain a copy, therefore it would seem to be proper to make a few extracts from these letters to indicate the nature of the intimacy with his superiors enjoyed by Gen. George Reid. Here is the copy of a letter from Gen. George Washington:

Head-Quarters, Newburgh May 20, 1782.

Sir: I have received your letter of the 11th inst., and another without date; the former inclosing the proceedings of a court-martial, held for the trial of Shem Kehtfield. Inclosed you have a copy of the General Order, approving the proceedings, and a warrant for the execution of the prisoner; the place of execution is left to you. The necessity of the contractors furnishing hard bread when required, has been

represented to Mr. Morris, who will doubtless take measures accordingly. I am, Sir, your very humble servant,

George Washington.

To Col. Reid, Commanding at Albany."

Here is another of the same year:

"Headquarters. Newburg, July 7, 1782.

Sir: The Honorable Mr. Renden, of Spain, resident of Philadelphia, Mr. Holkers and Mr. Terressen, have a desire to see Saratoga, and the fields of action, in that country. I recommend them to your civilities; and if it should be judged expedient, I desire you will give them such guard or so dispose the troops in the quarter where they are, as to give them security in their jaunt. I am, Sir, your humble servant.

George Washington.

To Col. Reid, Commanding at Albany.

Some of the correspondence between the General and Mrs. Reid is worthy of our attention.

General Reid's first letter to Mrs. Reid is dated Medford, May 30, 1775. A few words are selected: he wrote:

"I have not time to give you an account of our late engagement, only that God has appeared for us, in most imminent danger."

The next is dated: "Camp at Winter Hill, August 10, 1775. We are daily taking off some of their guards; and we expect to make an inroad upon them, some of these nights. May God prosper and protect us, I know we have your prayers, with many of God's people." "I hope yet to live with you in peace and tranquility, when we have subdued the enemies of our country. I commend you and my dear children to the Shepherd of Israel." He wrote many affectionate letters to Mrs. Reid, in every instance placing particular stress upon the protection afforded him by his confidence and trust in Divine Providence.

Here is just one of Mrs. Reid's letters to her husband:

"Londonderry, September 8, 1776.

I have received your letters of July 6th and 21st, also August 10th, and to the former of those two would say, that God has laid you under the greatest obligations. Every mercy, every escape, must be accounted for. May we be prepared for the great day of account."

One more brief message from the General to Mrs. Reid of the date June 11, 1783: "We are in daily expectation of a final dissolution of the Army. I send by a public wagon a chest, containing various matters

for which I have no occasion, and you will find in it the old regimental colors and standard of the regiment, which you will take particular care of, with some papers in the till. I shall make the best of my way to your cottage."

These letters do not represent the fullness and tenderness of affection that are expressed in many of the other letters.

THE LATEST YEARS.

And under that Divine protection, in which this valorous soldier trusted far more than seven years of unceasing war and vigilance, he was permitted to return to his family in a good state of health. He could rejoice with the faithful companion, that God had dealt so kindly with all of the family. All of the five children, that were such kids when he went away to war, ranging from one year old to nine, had grown up, the eldest already a woman of culture and promise.

The General was fifty two years of age when he led his minutemen to Medford to join the army, and when he came back to settle down to peace and tranquility, with Molly Reid and the children in the cottage, he was sixty. And here were the three

promising boys already old enough to be of service on the farm. The house was unfinished, when the father went away, but now the building with additions and repairs could be attended to with the help of the boys, and life would be one continual dream of comfort and happiness, and without the struggle for maintenance.

How far the realization of a retired life of peaceful occupation and domestic comfort extended we can only conjecture by comparison. From the record of the stone in the old burying ground, and other traditions of the family, we are led to the conclusion that the more distinguished men of the world are the more lonely and isolated. It is the habit of the children of remarkable people to scatter, and become fixed in other places; and without intending to remain abroad they fail to return while the old folks can enjoy their presence. The Generals three promising sons all fulfilled in a large measure the best interests and purposes of their fellow-men in useful occupations, but they went far from home and the home folks; and James died a banker in London and John died a merchant in Philadelphia; and George died a lawyer in Boston.

Of the two daughters it was noted that Elizabeth married Robert McGregor, and it may be added that she became the mother of nine children. Mary married the Hon. Samuel Dinsmoor, once Governor of New Hampshire and succeeded by a son, who was also a governor of New Hampshire.

For more than twenty years, Gen. George and Molly Reid lived to enjoy the peace and tranquility together, after he returned from the wars of the Revolution. Molly Reid known and distinguished for her many estimable qualities, made the declining years of her honorable husband comfortable and happy; while both of them enjoyed the admiration and respect of a large circle of friends. He died September 17, 1815 at a public house, where they had lived some years after moving from the homestead of their early marriage. And there much nearer to the life and center of the town the widow lived until her death April 7, 1823. This latter house was noted for hospitality and the entertainment of travelers, and especially old army officers, survivors and relics of the Revolutionary war.

There is a Chapter of the D. A. R. in the town of Derry, named for the devoted wife

of the General. The Molly Reid Chapter. It is in a vigorous and healthy condition, always looking for opportunities of marking the birthplace of heroes of the Revolution with substantial monuments, and the graves of all of the old soldiers with an emblem of suitable design. The Molly Reid Chapter D. A. R. has the distinction of being represented in the National Body. Its historian being made a member of the Historic Committee of the National Society.

